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ABSTRACT

This study examined the success and failure of mentoring programs based on interviews with representatives of 228 U.S. colleges. The types of mentoring programs identified are faculty to faculty, faculty to student, student to student, staff and administrators, alumni, and middle school. The study compiled the characteristics of program types (formal, semi-formal or informal), listed factors contributing to success, identified common reasons for failure, and assembled a list of considerations for those universities and community colleges contemplating the institution of such programs. The purposes of the programs are also considered. Recommendations for these programs, based on survey results, include funding considerations, developing contact and assessment guidelines, providing training for mentors, ensuring confidentiality, considering gender in matching participants, encouraging follow through by both parties, and including a risk free trial period. An appendix gives more detail on survey parameters. (JPB)

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Mentoring in the Academy:
A Survey of Existing Programs

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Abstract

Mentoring, colleague pairing, and peer partnering are a few terms recognized by the academic world to indicate a situation in which a neophyte is paired with a more knowledgeable person to increase the former's awareness of certain matters. These relationships are useful in acclimating newcomers to a discourse community and preparing them for the next level of accomplishment. Telephone interviews with representatives of 228 selected U.S. colleges reveal a variety of considerations for operating mentoring programs. This study compiles the characteristics of identified program types, lists factors contributing to success and cites common reasons for failure. Colleges seeking to improve existing programs or to institute new ones may use this information as a basis.

Keywords

Administration

Alumni

Colleague Pairing

Faculty

Mentee

Mentor

Middle School

Networking

Peer Partnering

Staff

Student

Introduction

Mentoring is a term recognized by the academic world to indicate a situation in which a more knowledgeable person is paired with a neophyte to increase the latter's awareness of certain matters. There are several different configurations to these programs but all have guidelines which define their dimensions. Telephone interviews with representatives of selected Unites States college campuses reveal the failures and the successes of operating programs.

This study was done to compile the characteristics of known program types and to assemble a list of considerations for those universities and community colleges contemplating the institution of such programs. The types of mentoring programs identified are Faculty to Faculty, Faculty to Student, Student to Student, Staff and Administrators, Alumni, and Middle School.

Of those programs examined, thirty-eight had been started within the last three years, twenty-one have been in existence more than three years but less than ten, and only four have been operational for over ten years. Written assessments by the sponsors of these programs were virtually non-existent regardless of the longevity; therefore, the information gathered about the programs is primarily anecdotal. The parameters of the survey conducted can be found in the Appendix to this paper.

Purpose of the Program

There are three purposes common to the creation of mentoring programs in the academy. First is to retain employees or students

by fostering loyalty and engendering a sense of belonging. This can also help to increase targeted populations such as women, minorities or disadvantaged students. Second is to acclimate the mentees to their new surroundings. Getting to know the campus, the business community, and the social scene helps mentees make connections necessary to their growth as faculty members, staff, students, etc. Additionally, networking encourages interpersonal communication, discourages cliques, stimulates mentees' growth in social and academic concerns, and can influence career and promotion goals. Third, mentors become role models for the mentees. They can help guide the mentees in developing skills in leadership, research, service, and teaching.

Special considerations for Faculty mentoring programs are to provide faculty with research partners, develop pedagogical skills of new faculty, and to formalize departmental practices. Middle School mentoring programs provide extracurricular activities designed to encourage at risk students to stay in school and to consider attending college.

Characteristics of Program Types

This survey identified three categories of mentoring programs: Formal - comprised of specific requirements and a defined mentoring process including an evaluation; Semi-Formal - possessing guidelines individually determined with little or no evaluation; Informal - having no requirements and little or no evaluation.

Characteristics of the Formal programs include university or

department mandated involvement and fulfillment of specific requirements such as a determined number of meetings, hours of contact, and periodic progress reports. In the Student to Student mentoring program, students must maintain a designated GPA and acquire letters of recommendation from faculty members. Training is provided for the mentor and/or mentee via orientation seminars and workshops designed to strengthen leadership and communication skills. Benefits and rewards for participation function as incentives. For example: remuneration, tuition waiver, award certificates, and recommendations from supervisors may accompany active involvement with a program.

In Formal programs, institutional resources such as budgets, coordinators, and staff are of great importance. Initiators of mentoring programs tend to underestimate the time and resources needed to set up and maintain a successful program. As a service oriented activity, it is intensive work. Periodic assessments enable the coordinators to address any need for change to keep the program relevant and productive for the participants. Only fourteen of the programs surveyed possess these assets.

For example, the Formal Middle School mentoring programs budget and organize monthly excursions to businesses, museums, college campuses, and sports events. Mentor-sponsored luncheons enable mentors and mentees to meet in a relaxed atmosphere. The mentee is responsible for maintaining program standards to remain eligible for participation.

Semi-formal mentoring programs share some characteristics of

the Formal category. Twenty-seven programs in the study indicated that they had an application process, workshops for the mentor, general meetings for both mentors and mentees, written guidelines for the mentor/mentee relationship including faculty recommendations for students, and scheduled luncheons and receptions. Collaborative research opportunities may also be available.

Programs are considered Semi-formal when enrollment is automatic or voluntary. Participation is optional but there may be a recommended minimum for one-on-one meetings and phone calls. When participation is not mandatory, it is the mentee's responsibility to pursue assistance as it is needed. Participants list goals for their own reference indicating what they hope to obtain from the program. Self evaluations help determine their success. Assessment within these programs usually consists of polite inquiry as to an individual's progress. Seldom is there a written evaluative component.

The twenty-five schools classified as Informal recognized the need for a mentoring program and took steps to try and establish one. Mentees are encouraged to "find" a mentor on his/her own as at Indiana University's East Campus but this can prove difficult if faculty members do not wish to commit the time and effort needed. Generally these programs have no participation requirement and are entirely voluntary. "Word of mouth" and "grapevine" matching is frequent. Other characteristics of Informal programs are the lack of training for the participants,

the absence of documentation, tracking participants who drop out, and the scarcity of reports or evaluations.

Initiation of Participation

In most cases, participation in mentoring programs is initiated by the institution or the mentee. Alumni mentoring programs are the exceptions with instances of the alumnus/mentor contacting prospective mentees.

Typically, the institution begins the process by soliciting volunteers. Methods cited by institutions to achieve this end include flyers, letters, newsletters, brochures, applications, voice mail, and personal contact via phone calls. Other enlistment tactics include presentations at orientation, letters of recommendation from teachers or faculty, and direct requests for assistance from a department chairperson.

Indiana University at South Bend automatically enrolls incoming students in the Faculty to Student mentoring program. Paducah Community College in Kentucky requires part time and first year faculty to remain in the program for a probationary period. Program Coordinator Andrew Halford commented, "[Faculty] have a vested interest in the success of each other."

Faculty to Student and Alumni programs can allow the undergraduate to request a specific mentor whose career guidance skills have been recommended by other students. A former mentor at the University of Memphis suggests that if a department has no program, prospective participants should approach the department chairpersons to request a program be implemented. If one is

already in existence but lacks structure, the participants should prompt the desired changes.

Matching of Participants

Participants in mentoring programs are most frequently matched by courses of study or comparable extra-curricular interests such as sports or the arts. Common considerations are gender, ethnic background, similarities in life experiences (e.g. family circumstances, religious affiliation), occupation of mentor and career goal of mentee, geographic location of offices or housing, schedule availability, level of employment (Staff and Administrators), or the mentee's need for tutoring or counselling. A preference survey is often an appropriate means of matching participants. Random assignment is expedient, but noting smoking, non-smoking, male, female, sports, or fine arts preferences can lead to more successful pairings.

Faculty mentoring programs usually have more stringent guidelines for matching participants. Department chairpersons may recommend a partnership or individuals from different departments may be paired so as to broaden the perspectives of the participants. Assessments of the mentee's weaknesses and the mentor's strengths may be done to counterbalance the partnership.

The Mentor's Profile

Each type of program has its own criteria for becoming a mentor but in all instances the mentor should have an unquestioned interest in helping the mentee for the aforementioned purposes. Ideally, they should possess a

reputation for being trustworthy, caring, and for supporting professional standards. This means that they are an established and productive member of the community and possess an expertise in areas such as teaching, research, organization, etc.. Consent or approval from the Dean, President, Department Chairperson, or Faculty is often required. The individual must possess strong guidance skills, have basic knowledge of college programs, present a professional demeanor, and be willing to attend meetings and workshops with the mentee. The Student mentors must maintain a determined GPA, plan to attend the school the following year, and demonstrate a positive role model.

The mentor earns a Vita hit for tenure and/or promotion purposes, internship credit, or resume augmentation noting his/her competency skills in commitment and leadership. Other incentives can include social events such as luncheons and receptions, a certificate upon completion of the program or an official report filed annually, delineating the mentor's service to the university.

Participation can also benefit the mentor in personal fulfillment, helping to build a sense of "community," and often providing reciprocal learning opportunities. In some cases a stipend or research allowance is available for mentors. East Tennessee State University for example, encourages collaborative research partnerships which can advance knowledge in a given field. Lasting friendships are also a frequent result of mentoring partnerships.

The Mentee's Profile

A mentee is usually a student, faculty, staff or administrator new to the university environment. Alumni mentoring programs can include post-graduates. The mentees have the opportunity to gain knowledge, experience, and direction from their mentors. They gain a support system which can aid them in acclimating to the campus and to the community. Ideally, the programs should boost morale and foster loyalty to the university at all levels of participation. Additionally, personal contacts can lead to recommendations for higher levels of education or employment and assistance in tenure, promotion, and review processes.

Student mentees are incoming freshmen, transfers, or members of a targeted population such as disabled, minority, non-traditional, "at risk," etc. Most are required to remain in the program for a specified amount of time, usually one year. A study skills course is frequently a component of student programs. The goal is to develop the mentee's study habits, improve time management skills, and to establish an advisory relationship for academic and personal matters. As institutions strive for student retention, a foundation for academic success is critical. It is to the mentee's advantage to meet with the mentor on a regular basis, to remain open to suggestions, and to be receptive to constructive criticism. Still, fifteen of the programs surveyed did not have specific requirements for participation.

Among the variants in this category, West Virginia

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University provides a program which assists undergraduates on a graduate studies track. The student can earn college credit under the provision for internship, directed study or independent study while "shadowing" a professor or a graduate student. In this way the mentee can gain insight as to those roles and report on his/her findings. In Alumni Mentoring Programs such as that at Grove City College in Pennsylvania, mentees and mentors can be matched geographically to aid the mentee with transportation, relocation, and even job procurement.

The study found faculty programs established for part-time, non-tenure track as well as for full-time, tenure track people. Mentees in the first year of employment are expected to participate, even if he/she has teaching experience at another institution. Staff and Administrator mentees also must learn the particulars of their new positions. Ultimately, job satisfaction, employee retention, and higher levels of success result from mentoring partnerships. By having a vested interest in the success of the mentees, mentors promote standards which benefit the students and the university as a whole.

Barriers to Mentoring

The mentoring process can be impeded by several different factors; some are program specific and others universally problematic. Three key groups of barriers identified were: administration, trust, and image.

In the administration of programs, time and resources are frequently underestimated by the coordinators. As a service

oriented activity, adequate staffing, funding, and cooperation of participants mean the difference between a successful program or a failed one. Less than satisfactory experiences for participants can result from programs which are voluntary and not compensated. Voluntary programs often lack a paper trail of evaluation and assessment and want for administration and funding.

Trust is the basis for a successful mentoring partnership; however, this is difficult to achieve in programs suffering a shortage of mentors, unreliable chain of command, confidentiality concerns, and ill-matched partnerships. When participation is voluntary, programs may not have enough mentors. Monetary incentive becomes an issue since most mentors are not compensated for their time. Sometimes faculty mentors are reluctant to meet prior to the beginning of a semester for orientation. Schedule conflicts are ready excuses for infrequent meetings. If a reporting order has not been established or enforced, participants do not feel obligated to follow up on evaluation or assessment.

Staff and Administration programs indicated that the rapid turnover of employees as well as "tokenism hostilities" resulting from affirmative action hiring hindered the process. Middle School programs cite examples where the mentor is not cognizant of the mentee's family circumstances (e.g.: broken homes, alcohol, drug or sexual abuse victims, welfare family, etc.). In these cases mentors and mentees cannot relate to one another and misunderstandings lead to cessation of involvement.

Finally, image counts for a great deal in some cases. Mentors occasionally deride their programs for being "hand-holding" situations. Likewise, mentees do not want to be perceived as backward neophytes. Modest people hesitate to step forward as mentor candidates because they do not wish to appear egotistical. Cliques can result from mentoring relationships, defeating goals of interdisciplinary interaction, and discouraging participants who do not want to be associated with a particular group. Student programs, especially Middle School community outreach programs, lose youthful participants to peer pressure if the programs are not well organized and perceived as "cool" by the target group. The University of Houston's "Excel" program for example, strives to maintain a standard of relevancy to keep participants from losing interest.

Conclusion

To conclude, this study revealed advantages as well as obstacles to be considered as universities attempt to address the need for mentoring programs at a variety of levels. The following are some key points program coordinators and administrators may want to examine in relation to their own circumstances:

1. What's in a name? With the term "mentoring" negatively associated with "hand holding" university's should consider alternate descriptive phrases such as "Colleague Pairing" and "Peer Partnering" to emphasize the collaborative nature of the mentoring process.

2. Funding is frequently a problem, especially in start up situations. Many universities are able to incorporate these financial considerations into their budgets. In some instances, grants are available for use in establishing and maintaining mentoring programs.
3. Structured programs tend to be long lived and generally more effective. Requiring a sequence of accountability, program directors and their mentors should be responsible for administrating and supporting established policies.
4. Contact and assessment guidelines help participants achieve greater satisfaction from the program. Regular assessments and evaluations assist the coordinator in adapting the program to the needs of the participants. Relevancy and suitability factors can impact the outcome of the partnerships.
5. Participants should bear in mind that most programs are a service activity. By factoring in the time and resources needed for the performance of the various tasks, meetings, evaluations, etc., participants may be spared unnecessary pressures and stresses to allow for a more enjoyable, mutually beneficial experience.
6. Invite participants rather than soliciting volunteers if possible. Candidates who are known to possess the criteria and qualities desired in a mentor are more likely to respond.
7. Some programs may require incentives to attract mentors.

Examples are: stipend, cash bonus, and service award.

8. Participants need to be assured of confidentiality in personal matters. Censure for breach of confidence must be enforced.
9. Individuals may decline to participate because they dislike or fear the evaluative factor. If all parties are subject to the same rules, this apprehension may be dispelled.
10. Mentors and mentees do not have to share the same discipline. Benefits of interdepartmental pairings include the introduction to diverse resources, exchange of teaching methods, the opportunity to eliminate departmental cliques.
11. Multiple mentors for multiple mentees can be very productive. Mentees can report to a variety of mentors to gain knowledge in the mentors' areas of expertise such as for research, teaching methods, and university policy and procedure.
12. Training is a necessity for both mentor and mentees. Mentoring is not a natural ability for everyone. "Knowing the rules," so to speak, is usually a boon to the process.
13. Gender may be an issue when matching participants. Surveys soliciting individual preferences can eliminate some of the discomfort inappropriate pairings can cause.
14. Preference surveys are a good means of assuring partnerships a good start. Having a few things in common can be a plus but some program directors feel that produces a homogenized pairing, thwarting growth potential.

15. Follow through by both parties is essential to a good mentoring partnership. Periodic prodding by the director or coordinator can encourage interaction when there is none taking place.
16. A risk free trial period would allow for reassignment of partners whose mentoring relationship is not successful.
17. Be realistic when planning a program. Try to coordinate deadlines with the general university calendar. Be flexible enough to accommodate participants' individual needs when it comes to scheduling.
18. Not everyone has the ability or the personality to be a mentor. A screening process should be designed to eliminate unsuitable mentor candidates.
19. Regard the community as a resource. Community leaders and business people can serve as role models, provide alternative mentoring contacts, and help mentees adjust to their new environment.
20. Mentoring is a reliable means for the university to foster loyalty, professionalism, and excellence among its members.

APPENDIX

Parameters of Survey

Universities on Survey List (Survey based on SCA Membership Directory, 1994-5)		579
Contacts		228
Universities with no mentoring programs		118
Universities with mentoring programs		110
Completed questionnaires		61
Student to Student	7	
Faculty to Student	18	
Faculty to Faculty	25	
Staff and Administration	6	
Alumni	3	
Middle School Mentoring	2	
Incomplete Questi aires		49
No responses		89
Universities with mentoring programs offered by communication departments		18
Student to Student	0	
Faculty to Student	2	
Faculty to Faculty	15	
Staff and Administration	0	
Alumni	1	
Middle School Outreach	0	

A more detailed breakdown of the results of this survey is available by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope to:

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